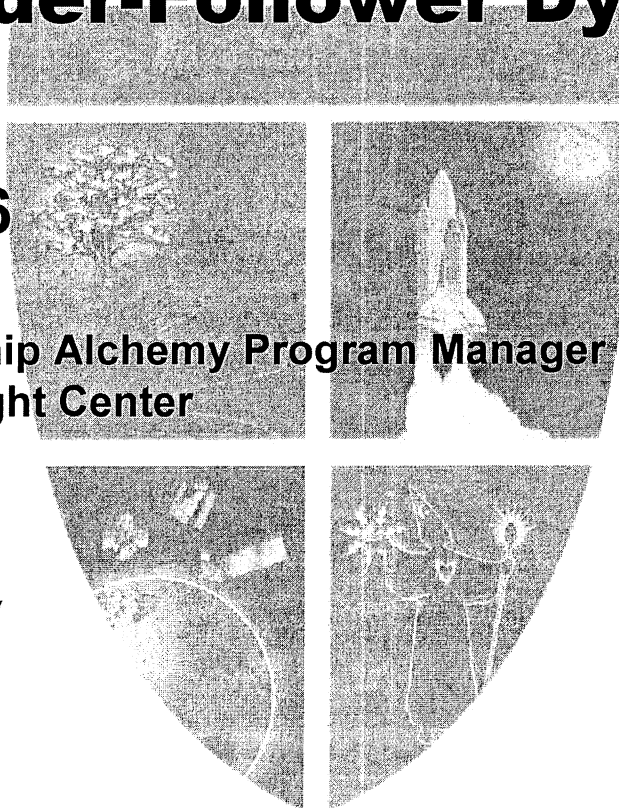




# **For the Sake of Our Future: Nurturing and Sustaining a Healthy Leader-Follower Dynamic**

**February 24, 2006**

**Gail S. Williams, Leadership Alchemy Program Manager  
NASA Goddard Space Flight Center  
Code 150  
Greenbelt, MD 20771  
301-286-0159  
Gail.S.Williams@nasa.gov**





## **Excerpt from *Turning to One Another***

---

- **Subtitled: simple conversations to restore hope to the future**
  - **“I believe we can change the world if we start listening to one another again. Simple, honest, human conversation. Not mediation, negotiation, problem-solving, debate, or public meetings. Simple, truthful conversation where we each have a chance to speak, we each feel heard, and we each listen well. What would it feel like to be listening to each other again about what disturbs and troubles us? About what gives us energy and hope? About our yearnings, our fears, our prayers, our children?” - Margaret Wheatley**
-



# **What are Some Big Picture Issues Currently Impacting NASA?**

---

- **President's Vision for U.S. Space Exploration**
  - **Lessons learned from the Challenger and Columbia Accidents**
    - **Difficulty of minority opinions to percolate up...all voices must be heard, which can be difficult when facing a hierarchy**
    - **NASA's organizational culture had as much to do with this accident as foam did**
    - **Leaders create culture. It is their responsibility to change it...Leaders are responsible for establishing the conditions that lead to their subordinates successes or failures...**
  - **President's Management Agenda and "Getting to Green"**
  - **Constrained budget**
  - **Aging workforce – average age is ~46 – and large number of "retirement eligibles" combined with constrained hiring authority**
-



# Leadership is a Way of Being

*"How we see the world determines the possibilities we identify and the actions we take.  
If you change the observer that you are, you create more possibilities for action."*

---

- **Leadership and Followership**

- A leader's role is to influence both the context and the mood
- Leaders make choices and take responsibility for their own learning and actions
- Everyone can and should be a leader, as circumstances warrant
- A leader in one context can readily be a follower in another
- Leaders and followers co-create the future
- Good followers mimic good leaders and vice versa

- **Language is generative**

- Language does more than describe, it creates our reality and our identity
- Whatever we focus on expands and energy follows attention

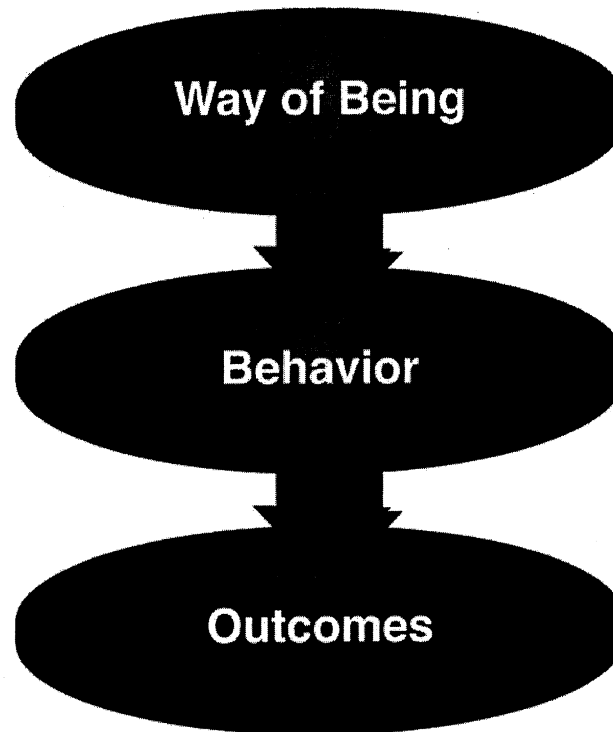
- **People learn**

- Holistically, through their head, heart, and hands
  - In a community where relationships are built both on trust and the respect for differences
  - In a mood of lightness
-



# Ontological Leadership

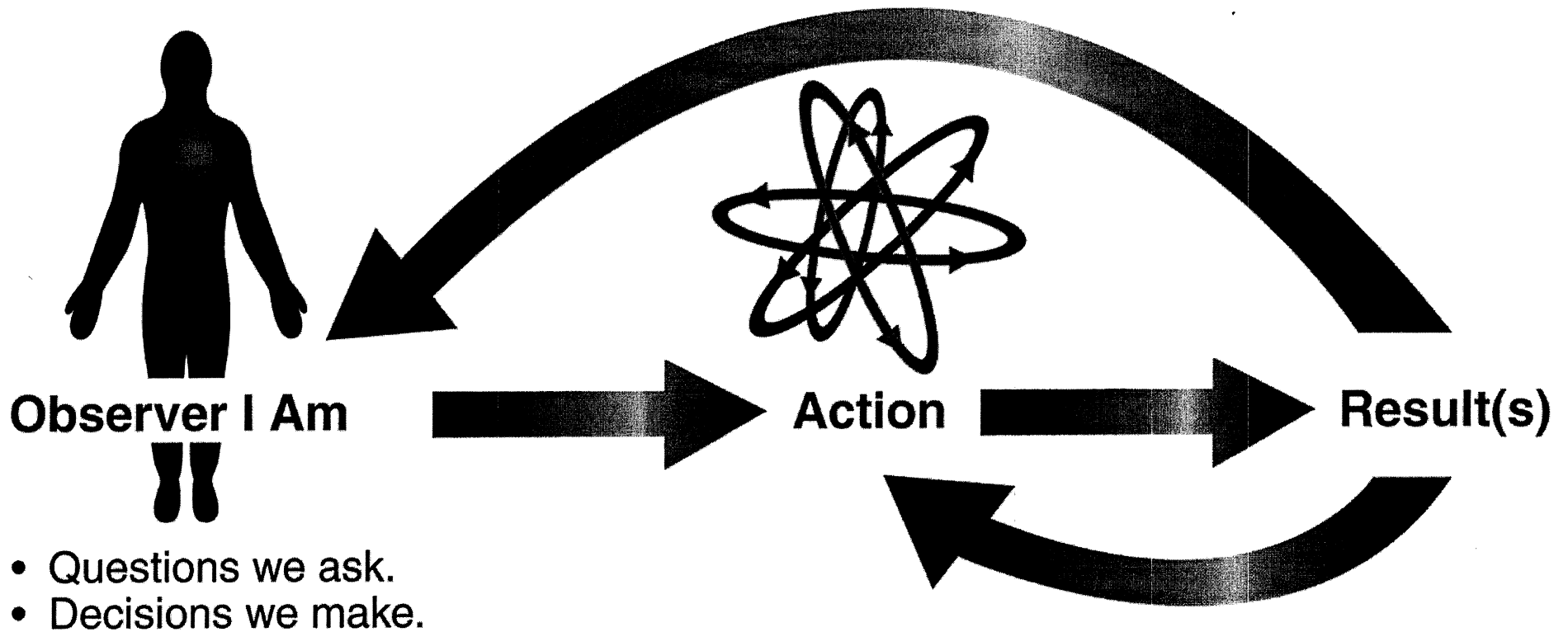
---





# Observer That I Am

---

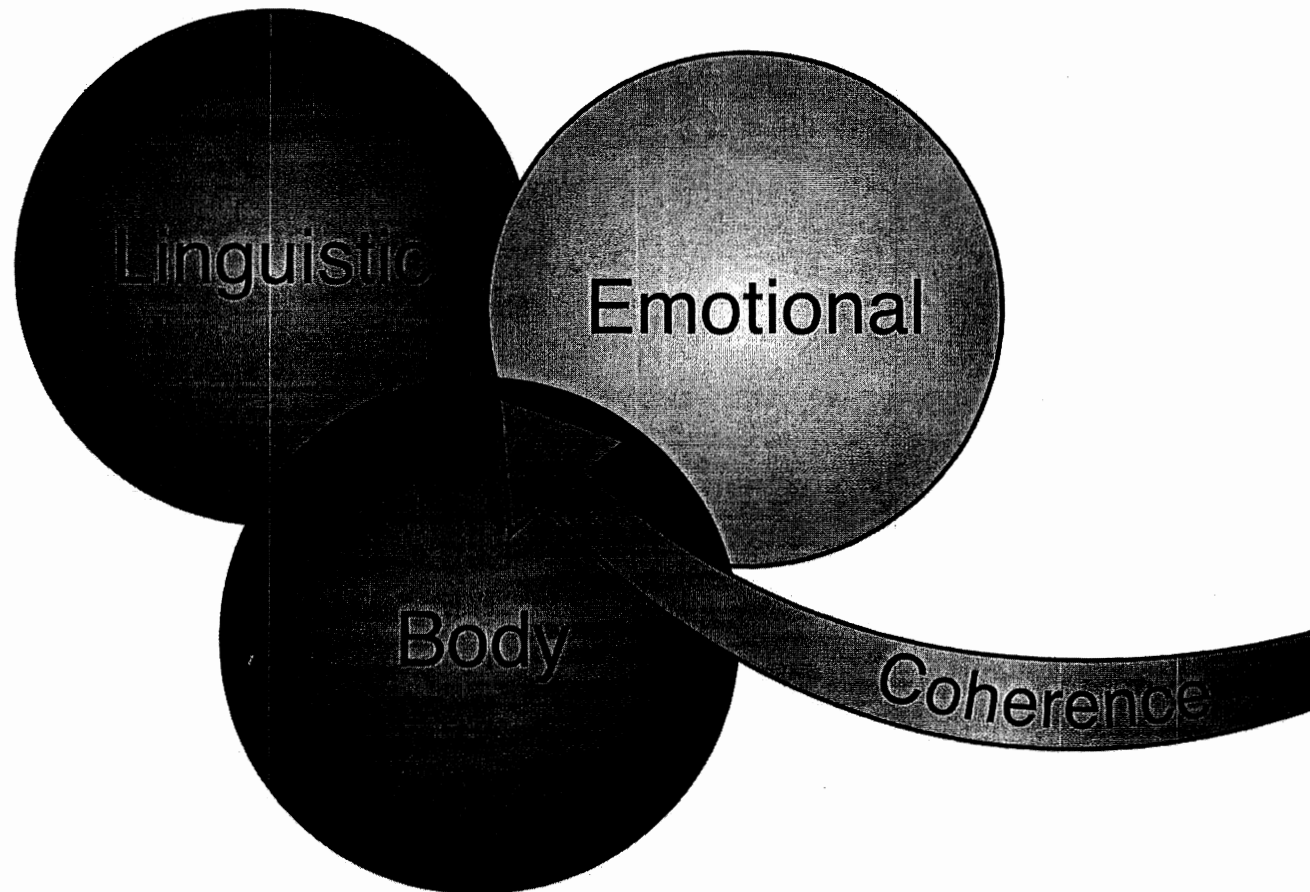


***We typically revise the action to "fix" the result.  
Shift the observer, and you shift the action!***



## 3 Domains of Learning & Leadership

---



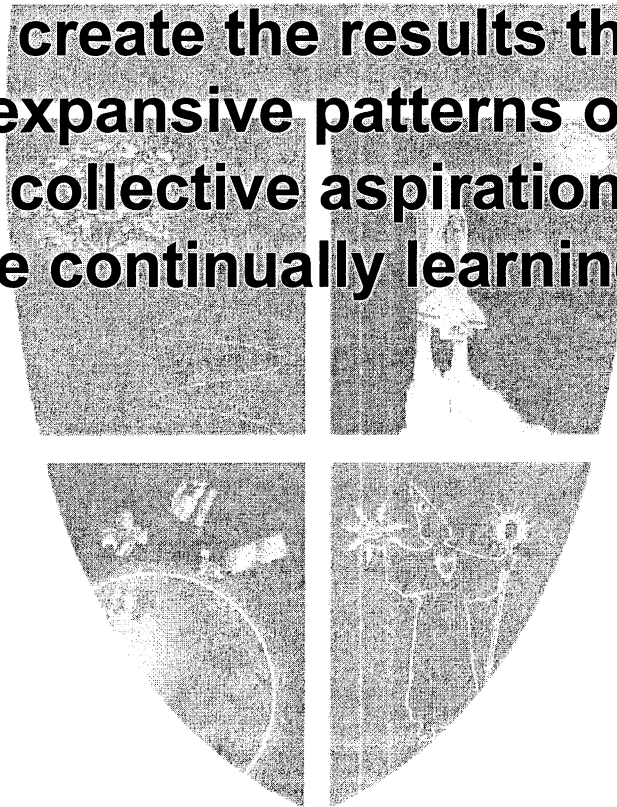


# A Learning Organization Defined

---

- “...organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together.”

- Peter Senge







# **Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Basics**

based on the work of the Corporation for Positive Change, Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom

- 
- **Definition:** AI is the exploration of what gives life to human systems when they are at their best. It is based on the assumption that inquiry into and dialogue about strengths, successes, values, hopes, and dreams is itself transformational
  - **Basic tenets**
    - People individually and collectively have unique gifts, skills, and contributions
    - Organizations are social systems and sources of unlimited relational capacity
    - Organizations are created and lived in language
    - The images we hold of the future are socially created and, once articulated, serve to guide individual and collective actions
-



# Traditional Problem Solving in Contrast to Appreciative Inquiry

---

TRADITIONAL PROBLEM SOLVING	APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY
<p>Defines the problem. Fixes what's broken. Focuses on decay.</p> <p><i>What problems are you having?</i></p>	<p>Searches for solutions that already exist. Amplifies what is working. Focuses on life giving forces.</p> <p><i>What is working well around here?</i></p>



# Social Virtues for Teams

adapted from Chris Argyris

On Most Teams	In a Learning Culture
<p><b>Help and Support:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give approval and praise to others</li> <li>• Tell others what you believe they want to hear</li> <li>• Reduce others' feelings of hurt by telling them how much you care</li> <li>• Agree with them that everyone else is to blame</li> </ul>	<p><b>Help and Support:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase everyone's capacity to:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Confront their own ideas</li> <li>– Face their unsurfaced assumptions, biases, and fears</li> <li>– See the gaps and inconsistencies in their thinking</li> <li>– Track the unintended consequences of their actions</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Respect for Others:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defer to others</li> <li>• Do not bring up or confront others' reasoning, or actions</li> </ul>	<p><b>Respect for Others:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust that others have the interest in, and capacity for, self-reflection and learning</li> <li>• Trust that others can work through their defensiveness without becoming so upset that they prevent themselves from cultivating their own effectiveness, self-responsibility, and choice</li> </ul>



# 15 Actions a Leader Can Take to Build Trust

---

1. Understand trust
  2. Make a serious and profound commitment to “name the elephant in the room” – to call distrust by its name – and break the secrecy
  3. Understand when you need assistance and request help
  4. Be a role model – practice trust and live in trust
  5. Assess trust on a case-by-case basis
  6. Address distrust by distinguishing it as a matter of sincerity, competency, or reliability and then intervene accordingly
  7. Make effective requests, promises, and complaints and create a culture where these options and language are available
  8. Support people in moments of failure, as well as success. Allow mistakes and use them as opportunities for learning, instead of times for blaming
  9. Create a culture that encourages people to be realistic and authentic in response to requests, allowing them to say yes, no, or renegotiate
  10. Create a mood that supports trust and allow for appropriate emotions in the work place
  11. Allow for the emotional release of laughter, tears, lightness, and seriousness that go along with the lifting of distrust
  12. Create a culture where the lack of fulfillment of explicit promises will be followed by a direct complaint and not gossip or rumor
  13. Generate pockets of trust, starting at the top
  14. Distinguish between authentic and blind trust
  15. Keep confidences
-



# **Shared Practices – Declaring a Breakdown**

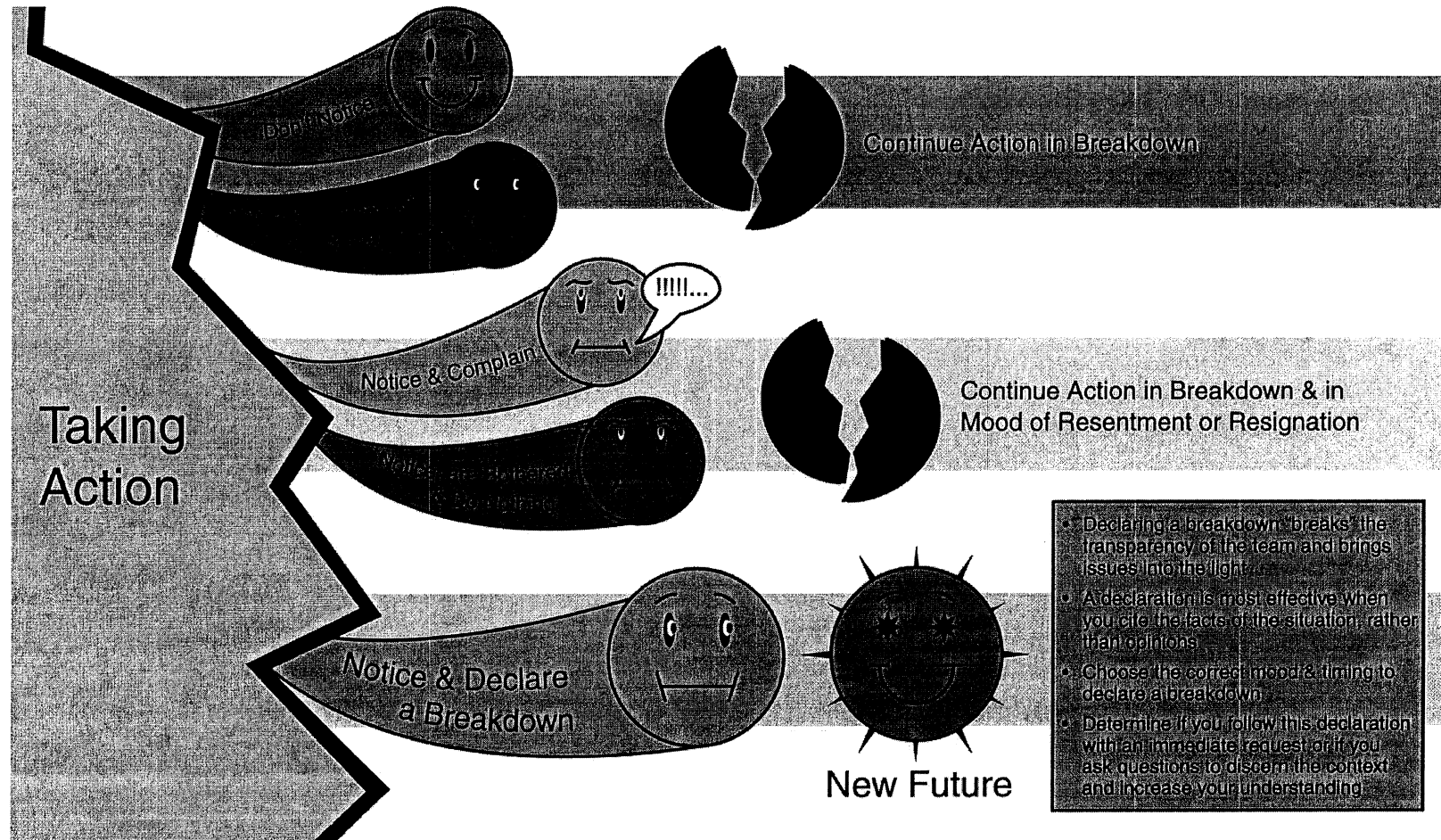
---

**Strong and effective leaders and followers declare a breakdown when...**

- **Something is not working as you wish it to be**
- **Opinions are prevalent and limiting**
- **A new way of seeing something would be valuable**
- **There is the “old game/old rules thinking” that limits possibilities for action**
- **New possibilities for action are needed**



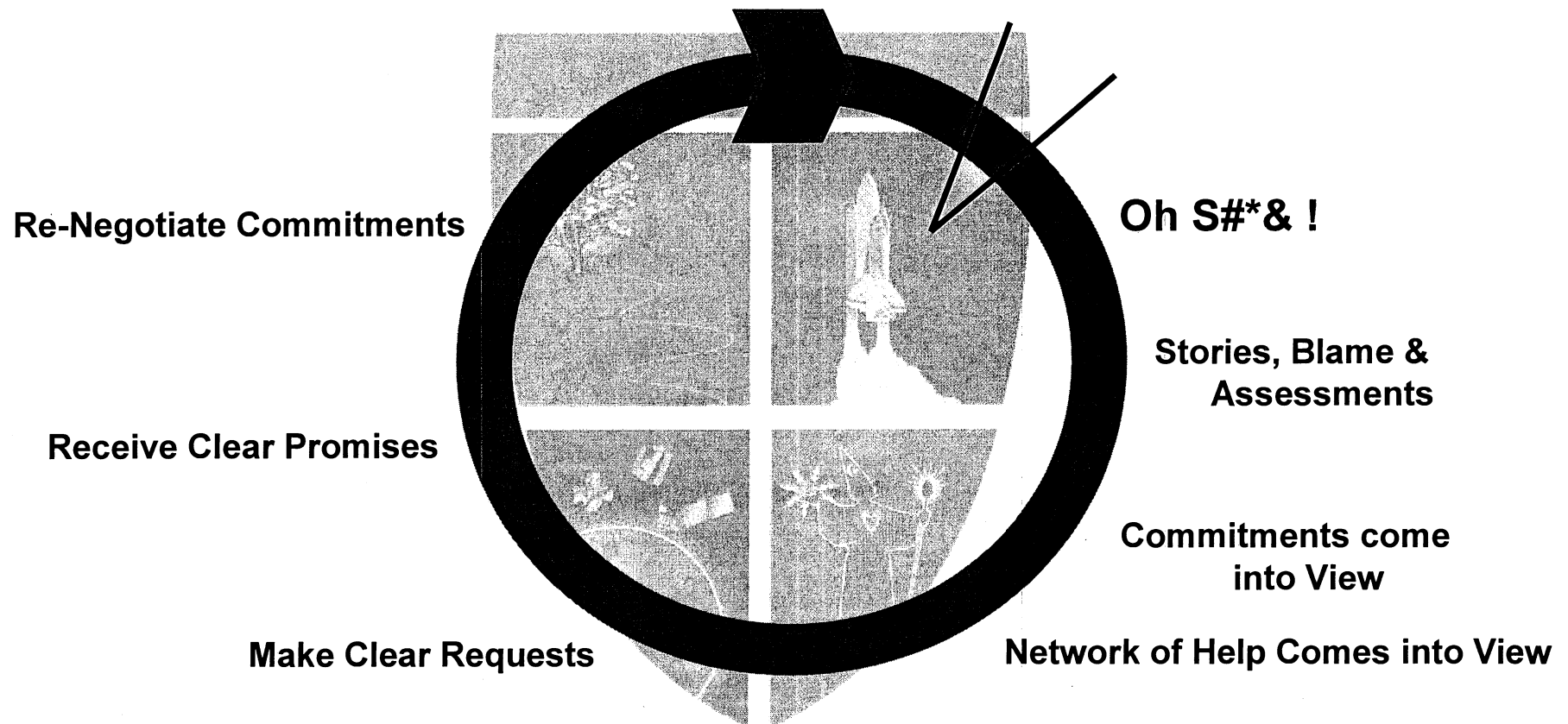
# The Flow of a Breakdown





# Shared Practices -- Anatomy of a Breakdown

---







# Commitment

---

- **“Until one is committed there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way.”**
  - The Scottish Himalayan Expedition, W. H. Murray